

## Willie Sutton's Known Prison Escapes & Attempts

**December 11, 1932**, Sing Sing Prison, Ossining, New York - Willie Sutton and fellow inmate John Egan each used hacksaw blades to saw through one of the bottom bars of their respective cells. Sutton, a skilled lock-picker, made his way through several doors. One of the mysteries of this escape is how they made their way through the one door where the lock could not be picked. Sutton tells a version in his book *Where the Money Was*, but there is no confirmation of the story. There has also been speculation that the escapees had some help from an inside guard. They went to a basement under the mess hall, where they surprised a trustee, John Tytsch. After binding and gagging Tytsch, they located two ladders, which they lashed together with wire. Using the ladder, they made it over the west wall of the prison from a point that was not manned by a tower guard during the late-evening hours. Once over the wall, they went up a small hill, where a getaway car was waiting for them. The arrangement for the transportation was made when Sutton's wife visited him days before the escape. The setup of the prison's visiting room provided an inmate and visitor to converse without others hearing everything said.

John Egan was shot dead at Porky Murray's speakeasy in New York City on February 20, 1933. Willie Sutton was captured in Philadelphia on February 5, 1934.

**1934**, Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Prison officials were informed that some friends of Willie Sutton were planning to drive up and attempt to bust him out.

No further specifics have been located on this plan.

Source: Philadelphia Inquirer, August 20, 1941

**1936**, Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Willie Sutton attempted one of his two unsuccessful escape attempts that year. Both were planned using the prison's sewer system.

No further specifics have been located on this plan.

Source: Philadelphia Inquirer, August 20, 1941

**November 18, 1936**, Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Sutton, along with William "Shotgun" Bishie attempted to exit the prison through the sewer system. In the prison yard they noticed a box that covered a grating that led to a tunnel under Cell Block 10, and eventually to the entrance of the sewer system. While they made it all the way to this entrance, the attempt was foiled when they were unable to break through the concrete entrance to the sewer. Other participants of the escape were George Wilson and George Moore.

Source: Philadelphia Inquirer, November 19, 1936

**August 19, 1941**, Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Willie Sutton was housed in the upper tier of Cell Block 7, where he figured out a way to get out of his cell through a skylight. Since the cell block guards routinely patrolled the block, he created a life-like mask of his face using plaster, flesh-colored paint, and hair from the prison barber shop. He started his

escape just before the midnight shift change of the tower guards. However, he was forced to rush back to his cell when sirens went off due to two other inmates coincidentally attempting to escape at the same time.

Sources: Several

**April 3, 1945**, Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Willie Sutton along with eleven other inmates crawled through a 99 ft. tunnel that inmates worked on digging over a period of eleven months. Once he came up through the ground, Willie walked two blocks, turned the corner, and ended up face-to-face with a policeman. Even though he only enjoyed minutes of freedom, it still counts as an escape.

The twelve escapees who went through the tunnel:

David Aikens – captured three days later in Delaware

Horace Bowers – shot and captured same day as escape

James Grace – surrendered eight days later, walking right up to the front prison gate

Clarence Kleindinst – captured same day as escape

Robert McKnight – captured same day as escape

William Russell – shot and captured four days later when attempting to visit his girlfriend

James Simister – captured same day as escape

Willie Sutton – captured same day as escape

Victor Symanski – captured three days later in Delaware

Freddy Tenuto – captured seven weeks later in New York City

James Van Sant – captured seven weeks later in New York City

Mickey Webb – captured same day as escape

**February 10, 1947**, Holmesburg County Prison, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania – Less than two years after being transferred to Holmesburg, Willie Sutton along with four other inmates successfully made it out of their cells and over the wall of the prison. Earlier that evening, an inmate claimed to be having an asthma attack and had to be taken to a nearby hospital. Procedures called for two guards to escort him out of the prison. This left the prison short-staffed. After smuggling a gun and hacksaw blades into their cells, Freddy Tenuto and Spencer Waldron cut through the locking bars of their respective cells. Hiding behind an entrance door to Cell Block D, the two armed inmates attacked the Sergeant Skelton and Guard Burns as they entered to make the scheduled rounds. After forcing the two guards at gunpoint to open the cells of Willie Sutton, Clarence Klinedinst, and David Aikens. Making their way to the Boiler Room, the inmates tied up the guards, put on their uniforms, lashed two ladders together and made their way to the prison wall. While there are contradictory versions of this escape, the most popular one is where a Tower Guard put the search light on the men at the wall, and Sutton, wearing a guard's uniform said something to the effect of "It's okay, we just have to make some repairs." Upon hearing that, the Tower Guard allowed the men to proceed. Other versions mention shots were fired and one or two of the guards were marched to the wall at gunpoint.

David Aikens, Clarence Klinedinst, and Spencer Waldron were captured the following day. Willie Sutton remained a fugitive until his capture on February 18, 1952.

Freddy Tenuto's whereabouts have been unknown since his escape.